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22 September 1964

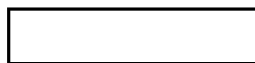
The Honorable McGeorge Bundy
Special Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mac:

At the meeting on Saturday the President asked why the Viet Cong had not taken greater advantage of the attempted coup on 13 September.

In extension of the remarks made by Secretary McNamara and me, the attached memorandum containing the Agency's views is forwarded for your information. No other distribution outside of the Agency has been made.

Faithfully yours,



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Marshall S. Carter
Lieutenant General, USA
Acting Director

MSC:blp

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(Attachment is: Current Intelligence Memorandum, OCI No. 2231/64,
Subject: Failure of Viet Cong to Attempt Seizure of Power During
13 September Coup; dated 22 Sep 64)

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OCI No. 2231/64

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
22 September 1964

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Failure of Viet Cong to Attempt Seizure
of Power During 13 September Coup

1. The Viet Cong did not attempt any immediate and direct exploitation of the coup effort in Saigon on 13 September for several reasons. The Viet Cong did not have the requisite strength to take bold action under prevailing conditions, and apparently did not believe such action would fit into their present strategy.

2. Only a fraction of South Vietnam's regular forces--about 2,000 out of 226,000--were directly involved in the coup move. Field units maintained a normal level of security operations against the Viet Cong in the provinces. An exception to this was the My Tho area in the delta, where 7th Division units which provided most of the coup forces were stationed. However, the coup lasted such a short time that the gap in the government's defenses was open only briefly.

3. The attempted coup, an impulsive act by a few disgruntled officers, apparently caught the Viet Cong as well as the government by surprise. Although the Viet Cong presumably are closely monitoring the political situation, they are not able to maintain a strike force poised to react strongly on short notice to any particular incident in the recurrent unrest. The maintenance of large concentrations of troops is contrary to guerrilla doctrine. Viet Cong reaction to previous upheavals on the government's side has shown that there is an appreciable time lag before exploitation of a given situation can be carried out. Moreover, the

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Viet Cong may also be fairly broadly dispersed at the present. It is rice-harvest time, and many of the guerrillas probably are engaged in laying in food stocks.

4. It is also Communist doctrine to avoid direct encounter, except under carefully selected circumstances, with the better armed and numerically stronger government troops. The Viet Cong will probably not be prepared to slug it out in a protracted action, until widespread disintegration of the government's strike forces sets in.

5. Finally, the Communists believe that time is on their side, and that their persistent politico-military campaign is steadily eroding government strength. The present step-up in Viet Cong terrorism and small-scale attacks, apparently in response to Liberation Front calls to exploit divergencies within the non-Communist camp, seems intended to hasten this process. The Viet Cong probably believe that bold action might tend to unify their opponents. More importantly, perhaps, they may reason that any precipitate effort on their part to seize control of key towns or cities would risk direct intervention by US combat forces.

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